



"From the Life of the Marionettes" to "The Devil's Wanton": Bergman's Creative Transformation of a Recurring Nightmare

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MARSHA KINDER

From The Life of the Marionettes to The Devil's Wanton:

BERGMAN'S CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION OF A RECURRING NIGHTMARE

From the Life of the Marionettes, made in Munich with a German cast, proves that Ingmar Bergman is capable of artistic growth when working outside his native Sweden. This latest masterpiece brings to full expression—both narratively and visually and in the most intense, highly concentrated form—a murderous nightmare that runs throughout his canon. The emotional and aesthetic power of this stunning film are best appreciated when seen in the context of his entire body of work.

Recurring nightmares have four crucial functions in the films of Ingmar Bergman. First, they provide germinal images for the creation of specific films. Bergman claims the nightmare of humiliation that opens *Naked Night* and the haunting image of women in white drifting through red rooms that lies at the center of *Cries and Whispers* were based on his own dreams. When he adapts these images to his films, they are not necessarily limited to dream sequences, but provide the central thread out of which the entire film is spun.

Second, recurring nightmares control the structure of many key films. For example, the journeys of self-exploration in *Wild Strawberries* and *Face to Face* are controlled by a series of nightmares which help the rational doctors, Isak Borg and Jenny Isaksson, break through their constraining personae and confront their fear of death.

Third, the recurring nightmares unify Bergman's canon and illuminate his process of artistic growth. The repetition of images, faces, names, and situations enables his films to be seen as variations of the same recurring nightmare. They struggle with the same impulses, juggle the components into new configurations, but never escape the repetition compulsion. When he was making his tril-

ogy, Bergman took an important step toward dissolving the boundaries between nightmares and their surrounding reality. "In the middle of the picture *Through a Glass Darkly* when Karin stands at the seaside and says three times, 'Here comes the rain,' that's the exact feeling of dreams, and then everything turns over. You stop watching from the outside and become part of the madness inside."¹ The nightmare becomes insanity when the dreamer no longer maintains the boundaries with waking reality. Earlier in *The Magician* (1958) this idea was verbalized by the scientist when he was terrorized by the surreal trickery of the mute illusionist. Trying to maintain control, he reasoned: I'm either dreaming or insane, since I can't be insane, then I must be dreaming so all I have to do is wait until I awaken. Once Bergman reaches *The Silence* (1963), the third work in the trilogy, his characters never awaken, for the entire film represents a nightmare from which there is no escape. Bergman became fully aware of this structural shift a few years later. "Suddenly about a year ago while making *Hour of the Wolf*, I discovered that all my pictures were dreams. Of course I understood that some of my films were dreams, that part of them were dreams. . . . But that *all* my pictures were dreams was a new discovery to me."²

This realization made new relations possible among films. For example, black and white footage from *Shame* becomes a nightmare within *The Passion of Anna*, which itself is an anxiety dream

An earlier version of this essay was delivered as a paper on November 20, 1980 at a symposium entitled "The Anxious Subject: Nightmares and Daymares in Literature, Art and Film," organized by Moshe Lazar at USC.

in color, reworking the same dream thoughts. Although Bergman recently reported that he looks at a film for the last time three or four years after it's released, makes notes on what he likes and dislikes, and then pushes it out of his mind forever,³ each new work seems to grow out of the previous ones and each leaves an indelible mark on his creative development. This complex interweaving extends from his latest film *From the Life of the Marionettes* all the way back to his cinematic debut in the forties.

Finally, the acting out of recurring nightmares is therapeutic both for Bergman and his audience. It's presented as an artistic and phenomenological alternative to psychoanalysis—like the Gestalt technique of dream re-enactment. This is most clear in *Face to Face*, where the protagonist Jenny is a psychiatrist who experiences a psychotic break. In several ways this film is a continuation of *Through a Glass Darkly*. The titles of both films come from the same biblical quotation, revealing the focus on the two-way search for the self, from within and without: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." In both films the journey into madness is triggered by the same germinal image—a woman staring at the patterned wallpaper. This image was based on an actual childhood experience that Bergman had when he (like Jenny) lived with his grandmother; he intended to include it much earlier in *The Devil's Wanton*, but omitted it because he could not make it work artistically or phenomenologically. In *Face to Face*, when Jenny visits her grandmother, ironically the old woman says: "I've put you in Karin's room. You won't be disturbed there."

Actually Jenny condenses the mad wife Karin and the rational doctor/husband Martin from *Through a Glass Darkly*. Although she begins as a "mentally illiterate" psychiatrist who has never taken "extended reality seriously," Jenny continues Karin's descent into madness, providing us with an even closer look from the inside. Karin's brother Minus, who is unsure of his sexuality and whom she draws into incest and insanity, prefigures Tomas in *Face to Face*—the homosexual gynecologist whose mad sister doubles as Jenny's patient and Shadow. In contrast to Tomas, whose rescue

of Jenny is based on his own experience of attempting suicide, Jenny's psychiatric colleague is of no help: "Twenty years ago I realized the inconceivable brutality of our methods and the complete bankruptcy of psychoanalysis. I don't think we can really cure a single human being." This doubt is echoed by the psychiatrist in *Marionettes*: "We're phenomenal at wiping out people's identities . . . no self, no fear." Before attempting suicide in *Face to Face*, Jenny defines her own condition, not in analytic terms, but experientially: "The dividing line between my outer behavior and my inner impoverishment has become more distinct. . . . We're gradually suffocated without knowing what is happening. At last there's only a puppet left. . . . Inside there is nothing but a great horror." Although her nightmares are terrifying, at least they put her in touch with her actual feelings. When she awakens in the hospital, Tomas offers her an incantation for those who don't believe: "I wish that someone or something would affect me so that I can become real."

This is precisely the effect of Bergman's movies. Some might argue: but I'm not neurotic like Bergman and his sick marionettes! He counters with rational characters—the scientist in *The Magician*, the doctor/husband in *Through a Glass Darkly*, and Jenny in *Face to Face*—who demonstrate that those who cling to their personae are the ones in greatest danger of breakdown and victimization. In the Preface to the screenplay of *From the Life of the Marionettes*, Bergman says the central question is: "Why does a short-circuit reaction occur in a person who is in every way well adjusted and well established? *Face to Face* dealt with a similar



The loving gesture before the eruption of violence ►

theme." All of his films imply there is no easy way out for anyone; that's why they are so threatening.

The most terrifying nightmare that recurs in Bergman's work is one where the dreamer commits murder; it always evokes the relationship between parent and child. In the rest of this essay, I want to trace this murderous nightmare through three key films in Bergman's canon: *The Devil's Wanton*, *The Hour of the Wolf*, and *From the Life of the Marionettes*. I have chosen *The Devil's Wanton*, also called *Prison* and made in 1948/49, because it marked Bergman's debut as an auteur and contains the seeds of everything he was to develop in his later works.

The choice of *The Hour of the Wolf*, begun in 1966 and released in 1968, was made for several reasons. It marks the turning point when Bergman realized that all his films were dreams. Of all his films, it is closest to the horror genre, merging his personal nightmare with the cultural archetype. It's his first film to foreground the "Hour of the Wolf" motif, which reworks the werewolf and Little Red Riding Hood myths that imprinted Bergman as a child. He admits, "This cannibal motif, the hour of the wolf, goes back a long way."⁵ Finally, it's a problematic work frequently attacked as being "insane" or out of control.⁶ Yet it was made around the same time as *Persona*, one of his masterpieces. Originally he intended to make it the year before *Persona* when he wrote a script called *The Cannibals*. It's a work he delayed, revised, and was never satisfied with; it clearly reveals his struggle to master this material.

The following patterns appear in all three films: (1) the hour of the wolf motif, (2) the use of a frame as a form of secondary revision, and (3) the three-stage revelation of the nightmare: the first stage, a bracketed theatrical insert, which displaces the nightmare by presenting it in a different mode or tone; the second stage, a verbal account of the dream; and the third stage, a visualization. By tracing these patterns through the three films, we will see how Bergman gains greater control over the materials, how he intensifies his use of condensation, how he shifts from coded surrealist visuals to a richer phenomenological experience of the dream, how he moves his audience from an external observation and analysis of the

events to a fuller participation inside the hallucination.

THE HOUR OF THE WOLF MOTIF

Bergman's early experience with the hour of the wolf is associated with his puppet theater and magic lantern. He says: "The devil was an early acquaintance, and in the child's mind there was a need to personify him. This is where my magic lantern came in . . . Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, and all the others. And the wolf was the Devil . . . with a tail and a gaping red mouth . . . a picture of wickedness and temptation on the flowered wall of the nursery."⁷ In Bergman's version of the fairy tale, the color red unites killer and victim as two faces of evil, which merge into the patterned wallpaper.

The werewolf myth is the story of the Shadow killer. Under the influence of the moon goddess, the good man is transformed into a wild animal, ready to devour his loved ones. Robert Louis Stevenson's version, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, was also based on an actual nightmare. In all three films by Bergman, an essentially good man—the poet Tomas in *Devil's Wanton*, the artist Johan Borg in *Hour of the Wolf*, the businessman Peter Eggerman in *Marionettes*—longs to murder his wife and commits suicide. The hour of the wolf is the time when the murderous impulses take over. Johan defines it most precisely: "This hour is the worst. . . . The old folks call it the hour of the wolf. It's the hour when most people die. It's the hour when most children are born. Now is when nightmares come to us. And if we are awake . . . we are afraid."

In Little Red Riding Hood, it is the grandmother who is transformed into the wolfish killer, and her gaping red mouth is the primary object of terror. These images are most explicit in *Face to Face*, where Jenny is dressed like Little Red Riding Hood in her nightmares and confronts a demonic version of her grandmother whose "face looked like a mad dog that was about to bite." The color red is most intense in *Cries and Whispers*, which contains a flashback to the childhood memory of the magic lantern. These two myths are reverse sides of the same cannibalistic fear—of devouring the mother, or being devoured by her gaping red

mouth. That's why Bergman's murderous nightmare always evokes the relationship between parent and child. These two myths are also associated with two developmental stages, both crucial to the child's emerging sexuality. The story of Red Riding Hood suggests the infantile oral stage where the harmonious union with the loving mother is disrupted by the development of ego boundaries, leading to a desperate power struggle between the child's ravenous hunger and the mother's dominating will. The werewolf myth is linked with adolescence, when the teenager discovers strong sexual urges at the same time that the body undergoes a physical transformation, including the growth of body hair.

In *The Devil's Wanton*, the werewolf and Red Riding Hood myths are separated into two plots but united in the central nightmare. The werewolf is the drunken poet Tomas, who talks about the hour of midnight "when even children sound cruel." He loses the boundaries between reality and hallucination, believing that he has actually murdered his wife; he brings a policeman to search for her body in a closet (the very place where the grandmother is hidden in Red Riding Hood), but discovers it was only a nightmare. In the second plot the young prostitute Birgitta (with whom Tomas falls in love) doubles as Red Riding Hood and the grandmother. Victimized by her cruel older sister and her lover/pimp named Peter, she lets them take her child and destroy it. At the beginning of her dream, Birgitta walks through a forest of people (an image repeated in *Face to Face*) and is given a jewel by her mother, who appears as a fairy godmother. Then the dream becomes a nightmare as she experiences two violent transformations that reveal emotional truths which ultimately lead her to suicide. Tomas is transformed into her sadistic customer Alf; she realizes that, like Peter, this lover is another potential killer. She drowns a doll, which transforms into a fish—an image that forces her to confront her own complicity in the infanticide. The nightmare reveals Birgitta to be both victim and killer.

In *Hour of the Wolf* all boundaries—between the two myths, between waking reality and dream, sanity and hallucination—completely dissolve. Just before Johan defines "the hour of the wolf," we see Alma and Johan walking through a forest

with a full moon low in the sky; the hour affects even the placid Alma, who for the first time erupts into anger and threatens to leave Johan. Later, we watch close-ups of their faces illuminated by a match as Johan describes a painful memory of a childhood punishment, where he is locked in a closet, which supposedly contains a devilish little man who would bite off his toes. When he begged for release and admitted his guilt, he was beaten by his father and then forgiven by both parents and allowed to kiss their hands (like the gift of the jewel). A similar punishment is described in *Face to Face*, but there administered by a severe grandmother. This closet image can be traced back to the scene in *The Devil's Wanton* where Tomas takes the policeman (a substitute father) to search for the corpse of his wife (a substitute mother).

Following this narration, Johan describes to Alma another event, which he presents as a confession of an actual deed but which we interpret as a nightmare or hallucination, partly because of the style in which it is visualized. In the midst of this very dark movie, we suddenly see a sequence that is flooded in a harsh over-exposed light, which Bergman describes as "strong, unmoving sunlight that is always most frightening" and which dominates his "cruellest dreams." In this nightmare Johan bashes in the head of a seductive child who tries to bite him and then submerges his body in water, like the drowning of the baby in Birgitta's nightmare. Johan's two narratives reveal that he, like Birgitta, is both killer and victim; he identifies both with the brutalized child and with the closeted demon—a pattern that exactly fits the sado-masochistic dynamic in the homosexual male, as delineated by Freud, and which is explicitly verbalized by the psychiatrist in *Marionettes*.

The transformation into the werewolf is most fully realized in a powerful hallucination, which absorbs and further compresses the previous narratives. It begins with Johan's shooting of his wife Alma, an act which totally bursts reality and transports him into his inner chamber of horrors, which is dominated by ominous birds, elongated shadows, and spatial disorientations. He meets the devouring woman (called Mother in the original story) who, in the midst of eating, makes him kiss her toes, reminding us of the closet demon and the for-

giving mother; he watches the ominous grand-mother peel off her face as if to expose a wolf, saying: "I must take my hat off, then I'll hear better"—a remark that echoes "the better to hear you with" from Red Riding Hood; he is costumed and made-up by the ominous puppeteer, who functions here as a demonic director; finally, he reaches Veronica Vogler who lies on a slab like a corpse. When he runs his hand along her flesh, it's as if he is totally possessing it. Johan's erotic pleasure is interrupted when she awakens with hysterical laughter; when he turns to see the vampirish demons watching from the ceiling, his own face is transformed by the smeared make-up and the surge of hatred into that of a leering wolf. Suddenly aware of his total descent into madness, he says: "I've reached the limit—the glass has been shattered." This moment is underscored musically by a blaring tone that sounds like the howl of a wolf and visually by a slow dissolve to water, and the boy's head bobbing up from the earlier nightmare, fusing the impulses of murder and lust. At the end of the film, we are not sure whether Johan has been totally devoured by his demons in the woods or whether he has committed suicide; we only know that he has disappeared from the island, leaving Alma wounded, impregnated, and imprinted by his madness.

From the *Life of the Marionettes* further compresses all of these elements into the opening color sequence, in which we see a man murder and sodomize a woman in an underground pornographic theater that is flooded in strong unmoving light, enclosed by red walls, and saturated in red brocade. The first image is a close-up of a woman's face. A man enters the frame, laying his head on her shoulder and saying softly, "I'm tired." She gently replies, "You must sleep now," and lovingly caresses his face with her hands. He erupts into fury, knocks her down, and in the struggle we see that she is bare-breasted, wearing only a choker necklace, red panties, red shoes and black stockings. She runs to hide in a closet, but he breaks in like a demon. Then she flees to a red theater, where he chokes her to death. During the actual killing we see only her legs going limp. As he lays her lifeless body on the red brocade and begins to rape her, the color drains out of the image.

Seen from the context of the rest of the film and

the rest of Bergman's canon, we realize that every detail in the *mise en scène* contributes to the murder. The cruel light is as much to blame here as it was in Camus's *The Stranger*. The man's opening line, "I'm tired," has been used both with his wife and mother. The victim's gestures of touching his face and suggesting that he sleep duplicate his wife's earlier attempts to console him during a sleepless hour of the wolf. This gesture and phrase are also typically used by a mother to quiet and control a demanding child before abandoning him to the solitude of his room. We gradually realize that the victim, a prostitute named Katerina, substitutes for the murderer's mother and wife, who is also called Katerina; she also condenses Alma and Veronica Vogler from *Hour of the Wolf* and Tomas's wife and the young mother/whore Birgitta from *The Devil's Wanton*. The murderer similarly condenses Birgitta's three lovers—the violent husband Tomas, the sadistic customer Alf, and her lover/pimp Peter—a trio whose unity was revealed in her nightmare.

In the Preface to the *Marionettes* screenplay, Bergman traces the names Peter and Katerina to the married couple—"two furious and disastrous persons"—who are minor characters in *Scenes from a Marriage*. Of all his works, *Scenes* is the most devoted to ordinary reality (though it contains a powerful nightmare sequence) and the most sympathetic to women and their growth.⁹ Yet *Marionettes*, the most advanced into dreams, reveals the greatest hostility toward assertive women. Peter and Katerina are also the names of the participants in the beach orgy described by Alma in *Persona*. It is characteristic of Bergman to take minor characters from one work and transform them into protagonists of another film in a different mode; he follows the same pattern with the psychiatrist from *Persona* who becomes Jenny in *Face to Face*.

The rest of *Marionettes*, in black and white, is logically divided into eleven scenes, all dated and labeled, that occurred either before or after the catastrophe. This structure is similar to the numbered and labeled scenes in *The Rite*, an anagogic nightmare which also contains rape and murder. In *Marionettes* the labeled scenes range from Peter and the whore fifty minutes before the murder, to a psychiatrist's "definitive summary" of the

event four weeks later. Both of these scenes immediately precede an epilogue, also in color, showing Peter in an insane asylum, where his behavior is described by a nurse to his visiting wife, whom he refuses to see (a sexual reversal of the situation in *Persona*). The labeled scenes function in relation to the opening sequence exactly the way the rest of Bergman's canon illuminates any specific film. Although the scenes are supposed to explain the catastrophe, they offer multiple perspectives that further complicate the reality. We watch Peter struggling in a deceptive marriage and dictating a deadening business memo; we witness his visits to his mother and psychiatrist, both of whom are interviewed by an investigator.

The investigator is seen only when he interviews Tim, who is one of the most illuminating characters in the film. The homosexual business partner of the wife Katerina, he is the one who introduced Peter to the murder victim. Like Tomas the homosexual doctor in *Face to Face*, Tim is suffering from a recent rejection by a young lover and is a survivor of the same hidden forces that overwhelm the protagonist. He calls them "two incompatibles. The dream of nearness, tenderness, fellowship, self-forgetfulness—everything that's alive. And on the other side—violence, filthiness, horror, the threat of death. At times I think it is one and the same urge." Like Peter, he feels both hostility and affection for his partner Katerina. In two consecutive scenes, we watch him bare his inner emotional life, each time claiming that's only half the truth, as if the layers of masking and revelation are limitless. In one shot he sits before a mirror confronting his divided self, both images equally authentic. This composition reveals not only his narcissism, of which he is aware, and his function as the homosexual double for Peter, but also his acceptance of multiple reality. As he pulls at his face as if it were a rubber mask, he exposes the material base for the werewolf myth—the terrifying transformation that results from aging and that widens the gap between the view of the self from within and without: "When I shut my eyes I feel like a 10-year-old and then when I open them, there stands a little old man, a childish old man." Like Tomas, his implicit incantation is, "Let me be real." Like Tomas, he is presented as an alternative to a psychiatrist who, as Bergman

says in his Preface, "should be nearest to understanding . . . but is farthest away." Dr. Jensen tries to seduce Peter's wife and interprets the murder as the displacement of aggression toward a possessive mother committed by a latent homosexual. It's not that this interpretation is wrong, but merely that it's reductive and partial. Although Bergman acknowledges that the psychoanalytic framework describes the dynamics in his films, he seriously questions its powers of illumination.

Actually the most illuminating scenes are those that come closest to re-enacting the opening sequence. They include two versions of the recurring fantasy of killing his wife, both addressed to the psychiatrist Jensen and both omitting the act of murder. In the first version, though Peter is verbally confessing his murderous obsession, the visualization remains beautiful and highly filtered. The germinal images are bright sunlight and silence. We see an overexposed image of Peter asleep in the foreground, while Katerina moves like a ghost in the background out of focus. The image dissolves to a screen through which he watches her combing her hair as he describes how he loves to watch her move. In both shots she is subdued and controlled. But then we see a huge close-up of her face staring directly into the camera, while Peter tells us she is looking in the bathroom mirror directly at him, knowing he has a razor in his hand ready to slit her throat, yet still smiling. He says: "I can feel the pulse in her throat." Both the image and the dialogue evoke the violent, loving encounter between actress and nurse in *Persona*, where they strike a similar loving pose in grey light and where Alma says while examining Elisabeth's

Katerina smiles when she sees the knife in Peter's hand, retaining the pristine beauty of the dream ►



face, "I can see the pulse in your neck, you've got a little scar there too." As in the earlier film, here the violence is checked. Dr. Jensen interrupts the fantasy by drawing the camera back to his office and describing the amount of blood that would be shed and that would stain the pristine whiteness of the vision. Like Peter's waking experience, the visualized fantasy remains alienated from his strongest drives.

In the second version, described in a letter that was never sent, the visualization is far more powerful and original. It begins with a white fade that dominates the visuals, though the screenplay reveals that the sequence was originally intended to be in color. As Vlada Petric has pointed out, Bergman shot it on color stock and had it printed in black and white, a process which enabled him to attain an extraordinary ethereal whiteness in this sequence. Bergman recently observed in an interview: "Perhaps black and white is better, because color is never true. In black and white, you create the color itself. Fantasy is created with black and white."¹⁰ First we see a huge close-up of part of Peter's face as he describes the experience. When he tells us it was no ordinary dream, "I dreamed I was asleep," we see a very realistic overhead shot of Peter and Katerina sleeping in their bed; it looks exactly like one of the time-lapse photos of recent laboratory studies of body positions during sleep. Later when Peter says, "I dreamed I was dreaming," transforming the mode into a lucid dream, we see a similar overhead shot, but this time they are naked and set against a white shimmering surface that has no boundaries. He describes it as a closed space, perhaps a sphere, which creates the sensation of floating. The size of their bodies and the selection of details keep changing, always linked by dissolves and white fades. As he runs his hands along her body, an image that is reminiscent of the necrophiliac eroticism between Johan and Veronica in *Hour of the Wolf*, Peter says: "I felt a direct connection between my brain and . . . fingertips, on every finger I had an eye." When we cut back to the close-up of the narrating Peter, he totally accepts the dream and its contradictions: "A thought floated like a ribbon through my mouth. If you are death, then welcome my death. If you are life, then welcome my life." This acceptance allows

him to reach the next stage of lucidity, for now he dreams that he awakens out of deep sleep, perhaps heading for a night terror. He knows it is still a dream and that the only danger is to be afraid, or to scream. He tries to waken Katerina but can't reach her; he finds her "soft and indifferent in an exciting way." When she does awaken and smile at him, he feels an insane rage—as if he has lost control of the fantasy. As in *Hour of the Wolf*, they move their lips but we don't hear their words; violence erupts in slow motion in the white glare. As he looks at her, the camera moves into a tight shot of his eye before fading to white. Then there is a moment of tenderness where they embrace, striking the pose of the *pietà* that Bergman used earlier in *Cries and Whispers*. When the image returns to a close-up of Peter as narrator, there is another abrupt shift. He says, "Then it happened all at once, Katerina was dead." We see a brief flash of her lying on the floor with blood spilled from her slit throat and Peter standing behind her, almost fading into the whiteness. Then the image turns quickly to the safer reality of Peter awakening in his bedroom while Katerina sleeps on, as he asks the psychiatrist in a voice-over: "Am I in fact alive or was the dream . . . my one brief moment of life—of conquered and experienced reality?" In this nightmare he moves closer to a fusion of word and image, of inner feeling and outward action, of the contradictory realities described by Tim.

Peter takes the next step toward violence in the following sequence where he attempts suicide after an argument with Katerina. In his first visit to Dr. Jensen, Peter had described his violent marital quarrels in theatrical terms: "It's all like a play with the lines rehearsed . . . though the lack of an audience is fatal." In the suicide scene he stages a dress rehearsal for the murder, even arranging for a male friend to be present as audience. In an upside-down facial closeup (a recurring shot in *Persona*), Katerina describes the sexual origin of their fight: Peter tried to sodomize her but failed, she laughed, he became furious and tried to choke her. Making his exit from the scene, Peter proclaims with deliberate melodrama: "What a handsome couple you two would make," and then adds unexpectedly, "when Christ was on the cross, he said, Woman, behold thy son! Son, behold

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thy mother." One suspects Peter learned his theatrics at his mother's knee.

In scene after scene we constantly return to the image of mother and child. In the grainy flashback to Peter's last visit to his mother, their embrace is captured in a freeze frame. Although she tells the investigator that Peter had a happy childhood, she actually reminds us of the motherhood story from *Persona*. A famous actress like Elisabeth Vogler, she gave up her career for her husband and children; yet, as her daughter-in-law observes, she is still terribly self-centered and remains "a decaying monument to her husband's god-damned tyranny." The mother looks like an older version of Katerina, with whom she aggressively competes for control over Peter.

The final step toward murder occurs when Peter enters the pornographic theater 50 minutes before the catastrophe. The sequence opens with a startling assault on our senses—a writhing nude body doing bumps and grinds to sensual punk rock. We recognize images from the previous nightmares—the glaring lights, the familiar gestures and phrases, the disturbing smells and Peter's fear. On one of the walls we see an unexpected picture of a mother and baby. We share Peter's feeling of entrapment for we know all the repetitions are leading inevitably to murder. The narrative structure reaffirms Peter's refrain: "All roads are closed." What we see dramatized so powerfully is that Peter and the whore played exactly the same power games he has played with all females; he wants to direct a passive woman and becomes impotent as soon as she shows signs of life. Although Dr. Jensen says that with the prostitute "suddenly everything was possible," the repetitions imply precisely the opposite. Although this scene is the prelude to the murder, the actual killing is not repeated. Bergman forces us to experience the repetition compulsion from the inside. We have a strong urge to see the opening climax again, realizing that when we first experienced it we didn't understand what was happening. It almost becomes an erotic frustration. The murder remains an elusive nightmare partially remembered and beyond our reach. As the wife Katerina says of their former reality, "What has been can never return . . . it's gone like a dream."



Katerina and Tim bare their inner horrors

THE FRAME

In most of his films Bergman uses a dramatic frame, as if to control the extended reality or as a form of secondary revision. Yet in the earlier films it doesn't always work.

In *The Devil's Wanton* the frame defines madness as a source of artistic inspiration: a professor, just released from an asylum, goes to a director with an idea for a movie—a vision of hell on earth controlled by an anarchistic Devil, showing that "life is a cruel but seductive path between birth and death." At the end of the film, the director decides *not* to make such a movie because the questions it raises are too dangerous: what is the meaning of life? why not suicide? Of course, these are precisely the questions raised by all of Bergman's films, including the two inner stories of Tomas and Birgitta. The frame defines them as two examples of hell on earth and also links them structurally. When Tomas hears of the movie idea, he immediately thinks of Birgitta, whom he has interviewed for an article on prostitution. But in the flashback to the interview, she hides her inner life. Ironically, fictional melodrama proves far more revealing of emotional truth than naturalistic documentary.

In *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman cut out most of the original frame. "*The Hour of the Wolf* is extremely personal. So personal I even made a prelude and a postlude of it, playfully 'boxing it in.' Nothing is left of this but the dialogue which accompanies the titles. In this prologue and epilogue I was guilty of a self-deception. It

was better not to play at any aesthetic games to hold this film at a distance. So I took these two bits away in two stages."¹¹ Despite this omission, the interview of the wife Alma remains as another frame. As in the interview with Birgitta, the truthfulness of documentary cinema is subverted, for Alma reveals very little and is cut off in mid-sentence while questioning the interviewer. What is most revealing is her face, which is captured in one long take and carefully studied in the final close-up. Bergman is still dissatisfied with the remaining frame.

"The difficulty with the picture is that I couldn't make up my mind who it was about. Had I made it from her point of view it would have been very interesting. But no, I made it the wrong way. After it was finished, I tried to turn it over to her; we even reshot some scenes, but it was too late. To see a man who is already mad become crazier is boring. What would have been interesting would have been to see an absolutely sane woman go crazy because she loves the madman she married. She enters his world of unreality, and that infects her. Suddenly, she finds that she is lost. I understood this only when the picture was finished."¹²

In *Marionettes*, Bergman resolves these problems by turning the frame inside out. Only the prologue and epilogue are in the present tense and in full color. Only they enable Peter to escape his marriage, in which he is trapped as a lifeless puppet acting out a charade and which dominates the black-and-white sequences of the interior. Only in the underground theater and the asylum is he able to act out fully his infantile desires and become fully alive, but, like the earlier nightmare, the prologue is only a "brief moment of . . . conquered and experienced reality." This idea is expressed visually when the color drains out of the image as soon as the victim is dead, softening the boundary between the prologue and the black and white sequences that follow.

The epilogue of Peter under observation in the asylum also merges with the previous sequence where Dr. Jensen presents his analytical interpretation of the events—a pairing that is bound to suggest the ending of *Psycho*. As we watch a huge close-up of Peter's face, moving to a tight shot of his eye with the color fading in, we are reminded of a similar shot in the nightmare; we hear Jensen saying in voice-over, "Only someone you kill can

you possess . . . only someone who kills himself possesses himself entirely." Though incarcerated and alone, Peter has finally gained full possession of his experience. In his barren room, he stands at the window, duplicating a shot from Johan's final hallucination in *Hour of the Wolf*. His only diversions are a chessboard, reminiscent of the death game in *Seventh Seal*, a teddy bear that evokes both the circus bear who is shot as a substitute for suicide and murder in *Naked Night*, and the stuffed bear that hangs inside the automobile which Anna was driving when she killed her husband and child in *The Passion of Anna*. In *Marionettes*, the final image is of the yellow teddy-bear, a silent puppet that Peter is at last free to dominate in peace.

It is fascinating that the screenplay of *Marionettes* contains no prologue or epilogue: the narrative begins and ends with the psychiatrist, the asylum scene is placed in the center as a poetic interlude, and the murder scene is omitted entirely. While Freud identified secondary revision as a process that operated both within the dreamwork itself (particularly through displacement) and in the subsequent dream report, in both instances it was a censorship mechanism whose primary function was disguise. In *The Devil's Wanton* and *The Hour of the Wolf* the frame functions in this way, as a means of holding the terrifying dream thoughts at a distance, or to use Bergman's phrase, of playfully "boxing them in." But in *Marionettes* the frame does precisely the opposite—it exposes rather than disguises the aggression and sexuality in the latent dream thoughts. This form of creative adaptation is as revealing as Freud's own technique of free association to specific images. In Bergman's creative process, this kind of revelation is always carried much further in the visual adaptation to film than in the verbal adaptation to the screenplay.

THREE-STAGE PATTERN OF REVELATION

The recurring pattern of the three-stage revelation of the nightmare can be seen either as overdetermination or as another instance of secondary revision. In all three films there is a bracketed theatrical insert, which presents the nightmare in a different mode; a verbal narration of the dream; and finally a visualization. While they

seem always to be three versions of the same story, they exhibit varying degrees of displacement and disguise.

In *The Devil's Wanton* all three versions are placed in the center of the film as consecutive scenes, each moving deeper into non-ordinary reality and decreasing the amount of displacement. The insert is a farcical film, which Tomas shows Birgitta and which actually is Bergman's remake of footage he bought as a child for his first projector. It appears again in the opening montage and jarring interruption within *Persona*. This little farce contains the deep structure and many germinal images for the grim stories of Tomas and Brigitta and for Bergman's entire canon. A sleeper/dreamer starts a fire in his bed, an event that brings forth Death and the Devil, who have been hiding in his room. Running from both of them, he goes to his closet where he discovers a killer with a long knife, who functions as a Shadow or closet demon. A policeman enters, seeking the guilty one, but chases both dreamer and killer who pass the knife back and forth. Amidst the chaos a spider is dangled over the bed—an image that prefigures the terrifying vision of a predatory God in *Through a Glass Darkly*. Still fleeing Death and the Devil, the dreamer/Ego, the killer/Id and the policeman/Super-Ego somersault out of three adjacent windows.

Immediately following this interlude, Birgitta narrates a recurring dream to Tomas, which she describes as beautiful and in which her mother gives her a jewel. When we see another version of this dream in the next sequence, it transforms into a nightmare, alerting us to the latent horror in the previous two scenes. Like dreams, Bergman's films teach us to trust visuals over words as more accurate signs of emotional truth. Yet in this early work the visualization of the nightmare is dominated by the same kind of theatrical surreal trickery that was used by the mute illusionist in *The Magician*.

In *Hour of the Wolf* the three-stage revelation contributes significantly to Alma's increasing participation in Johan's madness. In some ways, this film is another version of *Through a Glass Darkly*; it continues to probe madness on the island of Faro, but reverses the roles of the spouses. In the earlier work, we never actually see the

mad wife's visions, and this helps to keep both the sane husband and Bergman's audience somewhat removed from the insanity. In *Persona* Bergman reworked the situation; this time the hallucinations are visualized, yet they are the mutual creation of both the "mad" artist Elisabeth Vogler and the "sane" nurse, also named Alma. As in *Hour of the Wolf*, at the end of the film the artist disappears from the island while the camera observes the surviving woman who has absorbed the other's deepest fears—a process that parallels Bergman's imprinting of his audience. Only in *Hour of the Wolf* does one character's visions actually infect another; the verbal and visual accounts of the disturbed artist enable Alma, as well as Bergman's audience, to participate fully in the madness, while the theatrical insert offers a means of escape.

Before the titles, we are informed that this film is based on Alma's verbal account and Johan's diary. Before she sees the first demon, Alma listens to Johan's verbal descriptions and sees his sketches of the cannibals. The demon leads her to take the next step—the reading of Johan's diary, which enables her to visualize three hallucinatory encounters as conventional flashbacks: in the first, the Baron invites the couple to the castle; the second encounter with the teacher introduces Johan's violence; the third meeting is with Veronica Vogler, who is used (like Mozart's "Pamina") as a demonic incantation that lures not only Johan through lust, but also Alma through jealousy. Once Alma accompanies Johan to the dinner party at the castle, she is a full participant in the madness.

This party is the context for the theatrical insert—a puppet show performance of a scene from *The Magic Flute*, which provides an alternate deep structure for Bergman's canon, one in which the forces of Love, Reason and Order triumph over the demonic forces of passion and anarchy. Mozart's celebration of the triumph of harmony makes us all the more painfully aware of Johan's disintegration into madness.¹³ Bergman says: "If you distract the audience temporarily from the course of events and then push them into it again, you don't reduce their sensibility and awareness, you heighten it."¹⁴ As in his filmed version of this opera, here he focuses on the faces of the audience; Mozart's music seems to soothe even the demons,

except for the puppeteer. Like a dream-within-a-dream structure, the insert represents an attempt to escape from the most threatening aspect of the nightmare into another reality. Its illusory nature is underlined when the puppet stage is transformed into a live opera; these conflicting realities are linked by a close-up of Alma's face, as if this is her last chance to avoid being overwhelmed by Johan's vision. The opera provides a glimpse of the world outside Johan's madness. Hence the insert functions, not as the inner dream, but as the outer frame. Bergman claims: "It's good for people to be woken up a moment, then drawn back into the drama."¹⁵

When Johan confesses the murder of the child, both Alma and we in the audience are even more deeply infected by his insane vision—for his murderous images are visually imprinted in our minds. Though he claims it actually occurred, the visual style forces us to interpret the sequence as a nightmare, and the harsh discordant music makes us contrast it with Mozart's harmony from the insert. Again, the words seem least reliable, yet they are essential as a triggering mechanism that releases the visual memory and authenticates its reality. In *Marionettes*, this point is made explicit, when Peter tells the psychiatrist: "So long as I don't utter a word, my anxiety is like a dream." Once he commits murder, there is no longer a need for verbalization. The same is true of Johan in *Hour of the Wolf*; once he shoots his wife, he dispenses with words and moves totally inside the hallucinatory experience—a shift that is signalled not only by surrealistic codes of ominous birds, peeled faces and dislocated eyes, but also by Bergman's cinematic distortion of space and light.

In *Marionettes*, we are presented with two very brief inserts—a fashion show in slow motion and a highly erotic nude dance. Both events have a logical place in the narrative, but their manner of stylistic presentation emphasizes their disruptive nature. Both intrude into the preceding sequence, coming before the label that introduces the scene to which they belong. Both performances reveal women as dehumanized puppets being manipulated by artists, merchants and consumers to communicate sexual fantasies, but they offer a stark contrast. While the fashion show displays the *Persona*, featuring costumes that express social

codes, the nude dance directly exposes and addresses the Id. The comparison raises the question of whether the bracketed insert reveals or disguises the impulses behind the narrative. Of course, this same question¹ is relevant to the theatrical inserts in the two earlier films. Yet in *Marionettes*, it also applies to the opening sequence, which can be seen as another theatrical insert, bracketed by being in color and by being labeled a prologue. On the one hand, this is the only film in which the dreamer fully acts out the impulse to murder in waking life, yet the victim is still a surrogate for the wife and mother. Like the fashion models, nude dancer, and even the stuffed teddy bear and chess pieces in the asylum, she is merely an icon being manipulated by the dreamer. As his fantasies take over his experience, Peter finds he prefers a silent partner—one who is sleeping, or preferably dead.

When Peter's mother tells us that he and his younger sister played with dolls and had a puppet theater, she immediately evokes Bergman's own childhood experience as a precocious puppeteer. This parallel emphasizes that the opening of *Marionettes* is the most highly compressed model for all of Bergman's films—one he almost omitted. All of his works feature his marionettes acting out his violent nightmares in theatrical settings, allowing him to project his dual identification with the ravenous wolf and the ravished child.

NOTES

1. Ingmar Bergman, as quoted in *Introduction to Ingmar Bergman*, a documentary produced for television by Lewis Freedman, 1967.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Arnold Peyser, "'I am a voyeur': a Conversation with Ingmar Bergman," *L.A. Times* (Sunday, November 23, 1980), Part VI, p. 1.
4. Ingmar Bergman, *From the Life of the Marionettes*, trans. Alan Blair (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. vi.
5. Bjorkman, Manns and Sima, *Bergman on Bergman*, trans. Paul Britten Austin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 215.
6. See Linda Buntzen and Carla Craig, "Hour of the Wolf: the Case of Ingmar Bergman," *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1976-77), 23-34. John Simon also attacked the film on these grounds at the "Bergman and Dreams" conference held at Harvard University.
7. Ingmar Bergman, "Introduction," *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, trans. Lars Malmstrom and David Kushner

(New York: Simon and Shuster, 1960), p. xiv.

8. Ingmar Bergman, "Cries and Whispers," trans. Alan Blair, *New Yorker* (Oct. 12, 1972), p. 55.

9. For a fuller discussion of these images, see my review of *Scenes from a Marriage* in *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1974-75), 48-53.

10. Peyser, *Ibid.*

11. *Bergman on Bergman*, p. 212.

12. Charles Thomas Samuels, "Ingmar Bergman: An inter-

view" in *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Stuart M. Kaminsky (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 131-2.

13. For a fuller discussion of Bergman's use of *The Magic Flute*, see Houston and Kinder, *Self and Cinema: A Trans-formalist Perspective* (Pleasantville, New York: Redgrave Publishing, 1980), chapter 1.

14. *Bergman on Bergman*, p. 222.

15. *Ibid.*

Reviews

THE STUNT MAN

Director: Richard Rush. Script: Lawrence B. Marcus, based on Rush's adaptation of the Paul Brodeur novel. Cinematography: Mario Tosi. Producer: Melvin Simon. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Hollywood has a saying about stunt men: you hire them from the neck down. Partly a slur against them as just "200 pounds of hamburger and a blond wig," as someone puts it in *The Stunt Man*, it also highlights their peculiar facelessness in their films. Actors impersonate characters; stunt men (and women) impersonate actors impersonating characters—yet do so by actually performing the dangerous feats (called "gags") which are too risky for the actors to do themselves. Perhaps no other members of a movie crew so embody the illusions that go into movies.

The premise of *The Stunt Man* adds a layer to this Pirandellian situation. While fleeing across a bridge, Cameron (Steve Railsback), a young Vietnam veteran, tries to hitch a ride on an elegant old Duesenberg car that incongruously begins approaching him, only to be cursed, kicked to the ground, and nearly run over. He bounces a bolt off its windshield in self-defense—and seconds later finds himself in the midst of a World War I movie. It turns out that he has mistaken this movie's stunt driver, Burt, for a homicidal maniac, when all Burt was really trying to do was successfully drive his car into the river below for director Eli Cross's cameras. Now Burt fails to surface, divers can't find his body, and the wily, flamboyant Cross (Peter O'Toole) offers Cameron sanctuary within the movie's cast and crew if he will replace Burt, thus covering them both when the police show up in search of both Cameron and

Burt. As Eli doctors footage of the accident and enforces the deception on his team, Cameron starts playing multiple roles, "a stunt man who is an actor who is a character in a movie who is an enemy soldier." On top of which, he remains a fugitive and becomes a lover of Cross's leading lady, Nina Franklin (Barbara Hershey). The craziness of the deception and Eli's Svengaliesque manner soon have him convinced that the director means to make a snuff movie by killing him in a re-enactment of Burt's fatal crash.

The bare bones of this plot may suggest a solemn exercise in separating Reality from Illusion, precisely the tone of the film's source, Paul Brodeur's 1970 novel. In his introduction to *Naked Masks*, a volume of Pirandello's plays, Eric Bentley defines the essence of such Pirandellian constructions:

... reality itself is a maze in which we are lost (only a god can see a maze from above, and the gods are dead) ... life is absurd, it fills one with nausea and dread and anguish, it gives one the metaphysical shudder, yet, without knowing why, perhaps just because one is *there*, in life, one faces it, one fights back, one cries out in pain, in rage, in defiance ... and since all living, all life, is improvisation, one improvises some values. Their Form will last until Living destroys them and we have to improvise some more. (Dutton paperback edition, pp xxvii, 381)

The movie reflects this morose existentialism, so much the coin of the contemporary realm that it has long since become a cliché in any formulation. Yet director Richard Rush has abandoned the slogging, depressive tone of the novel in favor of a giddy, euphoric spirit, bursting with comedy, speed, profanity, and the brand of hot-wired action that he learned to serve up while slapping together low budget rip-offs of the latest pop cul-

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[Footnotes]

⁶ **"Hour of the Wolf": The Case of Ingmar B.**

Lynda Buntzen; Carla Craig

Film Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 2. (Winter, 1976-1977), pp. 23-34.

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